

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

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"Cross Currents," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXV.

It was past ten o'clock in the morning, but in North Branston's sitting-room breakfast arrangements were waiting untouched on the table.

The room was not unoccupied, nevertheless. Pacing slowly up and down, with his head bent and his hands clasped behind his back, was Archdeacon French. Now and then he stopped, listening as though for some sound from the adjoining room; only to resume his walk again with a heavy, unconscious sigh.

Archdeacon French had carried out the intention half expressed to the young doctor as they turned away together from North's door on the previous day. He had returned later in the evening; and he had seen North. He had listened to a few brief sentences, before which all human sympathy, even compassion itself, seemed to shrivel into an immeasurable inadequacy. He had found himself in the presence of that which reduced to nothingness all human aid; and before that presence, at North Branston's own request for solitude, he had retreated.

The door which led into the adjoining room opened at last, and as the sound fell on his ear, Archdeacon French turned towards it with a start. No man of delicate perceptions can face the final moment, which brings him into contact with that which the elder man had now to meet, without an awestruck thrill.

It is not the difference created in the

outward personality of a man by the devastating power of a great catastrophe that strikes us first; it is the sameness that confounds us. We know that that which was, is crushed for ever; that that which is to be, is struggling to life in throes only to be guessed at. But the veil of the flesh remains intact. Our physical eyes see only the man whom we saw yesterday; a little paler, a little more haggard, but essentially the same.

The two men met in silence, but it was Archdeacon French alone who was visibly moved. North Branston was absolutely composed.

"Have you been waiting long?" he said.

His voice was low and toneless, but there was no strain about it.

Archdeacon French shook his head. His eyes were anxiously scanning the other's face, and the grip in which he still held North's hand seemed to represent his hold on his own self-control.

"Have you slept?" he said.

North made a slight, indifferent gesture of negation. Archdeacon French drew away his hand and turned towards the breakfast-table.

"You have not breakfasted," he said.

"You had better do it now."

North hesitated a moment. Then he walked up to the tray and poured himself out a cup of coffee. He drank it slowly. Then he took his watch from his pocket, and looked at the time.

It was the simplest everyday movement, and it was performed in the quietest and most matter-of-fact manner. But to Archdeacon French, as he watched the younger man, it came, with its suggestion of the inexorable sequences of time and action, as a sharp spur to the sense that

had brought him to North's side this morning. There was an external aspect to this, as to all other crises in human affairs; an external aspect in which the steady support of a friend might be of some avail, as contrasted with that inward aspect from which friendship might only veil its face. The day must bring with it a train of consequences—those hideous cut-and-dried consequences which follow on the heels of tragedy, and which must be met and dealt with one by one.

Archdeacon French looked at North for a moment in silence.

"What can I do for you, North?" he said.

His tone was eloquent of that which he would not put into words, and North looked round at him with a faint smile as though he heard and understood it from very far off.

"Thank you," he said. "Nothing!"

"You are going to—to—"

"I am going to Wilton Street," assented North.

A moment's silence followed, and just as the elder man was forcing himself to break it, it was broken from without. There was a hasty knock at the door, which was flung open almost on the same instant; and on the threshold, crimson in the face and short of breath, an extraordinary mixture of agitation and pompousness, stood Dr. Vallotson.

"My dear boy!" he exclaimed. "My dear North, it's—it's true, then? Dear, dear! Tut, tut! What does it mean? I said there must be some mistake! I wouldn't believe my own eyes! What does it all mean?"

The ghastly pause that followed was remembered by Archdeacon French to the last day of his life. North Branstons had made no attempt to receive Dr. Vallotson; neither by word nor sign had he evinced any surprise at his appearance. He stood gazing at his visitor in absolute silence—gazing at him as though the actual sense of his words were something beside the mark; gazing at him across a gulf which seemed to annul everything but a profound pity.

Interminable as the silence seemed, it was as a matter of fact hardly a moment before Archdeacon French, braced by the necessity for action, stepped forward.

"How do you do, Dr. Vallotson?" he said, with grave kindness, going through the formal greeting and obliging the little doctor to shake hands with him as a means of stilling his excitement. "I am afraid

we must ask you first to tell us what it is that you have heard!"

"Heard!" echoed Dr. Vallotson, turning to him eagerly. "My dear sir, I saw it in the paper yesterday evening! Such a shock it gave me as I may safely say I never experienced in all my life before. I couldn't credit it! Such a—such an outrageous statement! And everybody in Alnchester seemed to have seen the paragraph! Why was I not written to, may I ask? Why was I not telegraphed for?"

"May I trouble you to tell us what the paragraph said?" asked Archdeacon French.

He had glanced quickly at North at the first mention of the evening paper, the anxiety deepening on his face. A newspaper report of the interruption of the marriage service was a contingency which had not occurred to him. But North had heard the words entirely unmoved; the expression of his eyes as they rested on Dr. Vallotson remained unaltered.

The pinkness of Dr. Vallotson's complexion heightened, and his utterance grew almost incoherent in its excitement.

"It was headed 'Exciting Scene at a Fashionable Wedding!'" he said. "At a fashionable wedding, my dear sir! It stated that the marriage ceremony had been stopped at the last moment by a lady who was understood to be the sister of the bridegroom, and it gave the names. There was exaggeration in it, of course—of course! I am taking that for granted. But what has really happened? That is what I want to know! What has really happened?"

There was an angry self-assertion about the elderly, high-pitched voice which was blended with dread; and, as Dr. Vallotson's tones trembled into silence, North Branstons moved for the first time. He looked across uncertainly, and with a mute questioning in his face, at Archdeacon French. Archdeacon French responded in his own way.

"Go and keep your appointment, North," he said. "I will explain to Dr. Vallotson."

For a moment North Branstons paused. Then he bent his head.

"Thank you!" he said.

And without another word he went out of the room; he went down the stairs and out of the house, composed and quiet still.

There is a state of feeling, when the whole life is crushed, in which the anguish of the process is merged in a dull sense of the power by which it is brought about.

In the shattering of the very foundations of North Branstons' world even the rocks,

on which so much that was best in him had met with shipwreck, had sunk beneath him. His life was crushed to atoms. He was a man without a hope; without even a name. But in the upheaval by which this had been brought about the shadow of his life, at which he had girded, against which he had fought, had risen above the sphere of human agency or human strife; had changed into a presence, awful and incomprehensible. Stunned as he was, all that was strongest and best in North Branston had risen up instinctively to meet the force that was about him, in the silence of blind acquiescence.

About the house in Wilton Street, gaily decorated with fresh flowers for the wedding day, there hung a pitifully incongruous air of festivity, but North did not notice it. The door was opened to him directly he rang; the servant who had admitted him hesitated for a moment, and then with a low-toned and rather frightened "This way, sir, please," she led the way to the little room which Lady Karslake had been in the habit of using as a morning-room.

The room was empty, and the woman closed the door upon North and disappeared. North crossed the room mechanically, but he did not sit down. The next instant the door was opened with a rapid, nervous touch; and Lady Karslake appeared. She was crossing the room with swift, impulsive movements to where North Branston stood, when he slowly lifted his head and turned towards her. And as her eyes fell on his face she stopped short.

On a physique such as Lady Karslake's, eighteen hours such as those through which she had just passed, leave traces patent to all the world. She had come into the room pale, with nervous lines of suspense and dread quivering round her mouth, her eyes unnaturally large and bright, and with the dark hollows of sleeplessness encircling them. But as she saw North Branston's face, all those tokens of pain and agitation faded into insignificance before the ghastly dread that woke slowly in her eyes, and seemed to creep over every feature.

"North! North!"

The two words came from her the merest whisper, a cry wrung from the overstrung nerves, stretched now to a pitch of unendurable tension. North heard it, for his lips twitched slightly, but he did not speak; he only looked at her. The next moment she had come up to him with a wild, rushing movement, and her fingers had closed upon his arm.

"North!" she said, "North! tell me what it is?"

On the instant, as her touch fell on his arm, a sharp shiver shook North Branston. It passed, and he stood motionless.

"Take away your hand," he said. His voice was thick, and his utterance not quite distinct. "Don't touch me! There is an awful atmosphere about us both which holds us separate."

Slowly, very slowly, as though mesmerised by his eyes, Lady Karslake drew back her hand. It was a slight action enough, but it seemed to put an extraordinary distance between them, and it was succeeded by a moment's pause. The pause was broken by Lady Karslake. She spoke slowly, and in a low, vibrating voice.

"Separate?" she said. "You and I? That is not possible!"

A grey shade was stealing even over North Branston's lips.

"Our possible and impossible," he answered, "are empty words. We use them as we will; we give them a significance which we declare to be inalienable and eternal. But the time comes which brings them into contact with that which shrivels them to nothing—the possible and impossible spoken not by us but to us!"

"By whom?" she said steadily; her eyes were flashing.

"By—destiny!"

She clasped and unclasped her hands with a quick movement. "Destiny is an abstract phrase; as to its practical bearing on life we can argue at our leisure. It is no such shadow that we have before us now! Whatever it may be that has come between us, it comes to us through your sister! Her influence has been against us from the first. She has stood between us, poisoning our happiness, jarring our love, since the hour when you told her of our engagement. By what right? That she should stand between us at the last moment, that she should put us asunder when we stood on the very verge of union which nothing could destroy, is the culmination only of the atmosphere which she has brought about us—which I have felt and struggled against and recognised against my will as her creation—during this last horrible fortnight. How does she justify herself? What has she to say?"

She stopped. Gradually, as she spoke, her voice had gathered force and volume, though she had not raised it by a tone. A proud demand for satisfaction; a long-pent-up rebellion. She faced him with her

head raised, her eyes flashing with an antagonism such as seemed to possess her to the total exclusion of any sense either of fear or dread.

For one moment North Branston's eyes rested on her face; rested on it with a lingering, unconscious gaze as if for the last time. It was significant of his sense of the inexorableness of that law of which the working was to crush them both, that he made no attempt to soften by any tenderness that from which he had no power to save her.

He paused a moment only, and then, with every muscle braced and rigid, he spoke in a thin, steady tone.

"I have no sister," he said. "The woman to whom I have given that name is my mother."

Heavily conscious that he must give her time, that to stun her was of no avail, that he could save her nothing, he stopped, watching her face. He saw it whiten to the lips as though her heart had given one horrified leap; he saw it relax into a shocked, bewildered repulsion; he saw it change again; he saw everything fade from it but the look of exquisite pity and tenderness which was for him alone; he knew that her hands were outstretched towards him, and he felt rather than heard her words.

"North! Oh, my poor North!"

Then he spoke again.

"Wait!" he said. "If any human being could take upon himself the endless sequence of results that follow on a deed, I would stop here. That cannot be. Not she alone, not I alone can work out what has waited its development till now. She and I, and you, are linked together by the power which crushes us all three. And the tie that holds us each to each is the tie that holds us to the same man."

His first words—either by the solemnity of hopelessness with which they rang, or by something in his face of which he was unconscious—had arrested her movement towards him. Her hands had sunk slowly by her side. A ghastly creeping fear had risen slowly in her eyes, stilling their tenderness into a helpless, fascinated stare. Her lips moved as though she repeated his last words, but no sound was audible. With a blind sense that the watch, even of his eyes, was all that he could spare her, North Branston turned away.

"The man I mean was once your husband," he said hoarsely. "And I curse the day when he was born, although he was my father!"

The clock was still ticking. He heard that, though there was a roaring in his ears that should have drowned the sound of cannon. There seemed to be no other sound in the room. Then, stilling that roaring on the very instant, there reached his brain the slightest possible rustling, as of a woman's dress. He turned sharply. The slender woman's figure which had heard his words erect and rigid, standing for an instant motionless, as a man does sometimes, wounded to death, was swaying heavily from side to side. With an inarticulate cry he caught her in his arms, and in another instant he was kneeling by her side as she lay upon the sofa. She was conscious still, and he saw it.

"Eve," he cried thickly, and his voice, in the supreme agony of its despairing self-abnegation, was like an inarticulate prayer to that power which he felt but did not know, "Eve, my love! We are in the hands of Fate."

She drew away the hand he held, shivering away from him as she lay prone, her face pressed down upon the cushions. And as though in that slight gesture there was materialised the division that had fallen for ever between them, North Branston rose to his feet, blindly and mechanically, and turned away. The agony that unites is endurable. It is when the power that crushes, isolates; it is when the helpless human creature finds itself alone with the horror of great darkness that has fallen on it, that the heights of humanity's capacity for suffering are reached.

The room was very still; so still that the little tapping sound made by the tassel of the blind, as the September breeze moved it to and fro against the window-ledge, struck out with a hard, echoing noise. The man and woman alone together, and yet so infinitely far apart, had passed beyond the region whence any sound or movement penetrated to the world of sense, as they had passed beyond the region where time is of any account. How long the clutch of realisation held them, whether the moments were many or few, concerned them not at all. It held them still and helpless, and did its work.

There was a long, faint sigh—the expression merely of physical sensation—as of a woman who struggles slowly back to life after long unconsciousness. It touched the silence and died away again. Then Lady Karslake stirred. A slight shiver as of bitter cold ran through her from head to foot. She raised herself and sat up, sup-

porting herself with one hand upon the back of the sofa, gazing straight before her with dull, unseeing eyes, as if mainly conscious for the moment of physical exhaustion. North Branston, standing with his back to her, his head bowed forward on his arms as they rested on the mantelpiece, stirred slightly on the sound of her movement, but he did not lift his head.

"I am not mad? I am not mad?"

The question formed itself on her lips slowly, monotonously, almost indifferently; and she sat quite motionless, all the mobility of her face dead beneath a kind of stupor. As though her voice, so changed, had pierced his very heart, North turned sharply towards her. His quiet gave way, and he broke into a hoarse, despairing cry.

"Eve! Eve! If you could have been spared! If you could have been spared!"

For the first time since the blow had fallen on him, for the first time since he had found himself confronted with the power which had laid his life in ruins, there had risen in him that bitterest of all realisations: the realisation of the impotency of regret, the helplessness of love itself. He let his head fall forward on his arm again with a hopeless, choking groan.

She had turned her face towards him quickly: not moving otherwise, however, but letting her eyes rest upon him. She did not speak, but she put up both her hands and pushed the hair back from her forehead, pressing down her fingers as though to still some pulse that throbbed and beat too painfully.

The stupor of her face was breaking up, was growing thin; and through it, fitfully revealed, there dawned a great and striking change. It was as though, in that dreadful period of stillness, something had come to life in her, dormant until now; something by which her whole nature was vivified, and endowed with forces wholly new to it. The sensitive, impulsive temperament, pushed too far, had touched the limits where the possibilities of rebellion, always latent in such a nature, assert themselves an active force. The nervous, capricious instincts of the wilful woman's heart, too roughly seared, had broken all the bonds that held them and passed into the realms of passion. The lines of her face seemed to grow stronger, forged by the fire that glowed deeper and deeper in her eyes. There was a desperate daring about the set of her lips, and an indescribable suggestion of recklessness now about the defiant pose of her head.

"Why should we not spare ourselves?"

Her voice was not raised, but in its low, distinct tones there was an intensity of feeling which no cry could have touched. She watched him with dilated, feverish eyes, and saw him lift his head suddenly, not turning to her, but looking straight before him. Then she spoke again.

"We stand alone together, you and I," she said, and something seemed to beat and thrill in her voice, held down, forced into abeyance with a power of self-control as strange in her as that which it restrained. "We are the creatures of the present, not of the past! The past did not give us to one another; the past cannot part us. That which binds us to one another cuts us off from all the world beside, from the world of the living and—from the world of the dead."

Her voice, grown hoarse and low, stopped abruptly; and in the breathless silence that followed, North Branston turned slowly and looked at her. His face was seared and drawn, as in the extremity of mortal conflict. His eyes were ghastly; they were the eyes of a man in whom all manhood's instincts have risen into writhing, tumultuous life; have risen to meet in desperate, agonising struggle that which must dominate them or be dominated by them for ever. As she met them, the flame burst through its wrappings once for all, and Lady Karslake sprang to her feet, her head thrown back, one arm outstretched in passionate accentuation of her speech.

"By what right?" she cried, and her voice rang out for the first time full and vibrating. "By what right are we condemned? How are we altered, you and I, the man and the woman whose hearts are to be broken, that that which we held yesterday we must resign to-day? By what fault of our own are we judged? By what deed of our own are we crushed? Why should we take upon ourselves the punishment which we have never earned? There is no law, there is no power, can justify injustice such as that! There is no force can bring us to submission to what is without reason, without right! We love each other! Let us hold to that! We love each other, you and I, isolated individuals, free, unfettered man and woman. Let us stand fast on that, come what come will!"

"It cannot be!"

He stood quite still, facing her, one hand resting heavily on the mantelpiece. All personal sensation seemed to have left him;

nothing in his ashen face seemed to belong to life at all except his eyes, dark and unfathomable. The three words came from him heavy, monotonous, touched with the immutability of the shadow beneath which he stood.

She heard him, and the words seemed to fall on her as an unexpected blow might have done. She threw out her hands instinctively as though to protect herself, and then she paused.

"You don't understand," she said. Her voice was low and quick, and something seemed to grate in her throat. "You don't understand what that means! It means—parting! Don't you see? It means that we shall never see each other again! It is all or nothing! We must ignore everything, we must deny and defy everything, or—Don't you see? Don't you see? North, North!" Her voice rose into a broken cry. "Have we so lightly learned what love may mean that we can throw it by like this? We are not children! Love has come to us unsought, unasked; the solution given to us of the problem of life. We have misunderstood it, jarred it, misused it; but we will not give it up! We cannot! We cannot!"

Drawn instinctively by the agony of her appeal, he had come closer to her; he held her hands in his, held them close against his heart as though he would have given her with its very life-beats, that strength which his self-conquest had brought to him.

"We must!" he said hoarsely. "That which is against us is not to be struggled with, not to be defied! We must submit!"

"Submit!" She had torn herself out of his hands, and she flung the word back at him, throbbing and burning with the wild passion of scorn that blazed in her eyes and knit up every quivering line of her face into a magnificent mask through which despair could not and would not break. "Submit! You may submit, I never will! It is your love that fails! Remember that! Your love? I said that we had learned what love might mean—that was not true! You have not learned! You'll never learn! What has it been from first to last? A travesty, a shadow, a broken reed! When has it stood between me and myself? Never! When has it stood between you and your cares? Never! What wonder that it cannot stand now between us and the shadow that divides us—the shadow you call destiny. Destiny? If you had ever known what love meant, you would

know that there is no destiny higher than love, that love is the one power by which we stand or fall!"

Before the quivering, unreasoning words had died away, touched into a sudden agony of perception which he had never known before, North Branstons voice took up the word as he faced her with his face convulsed and working like her own.

"It is!" he cried. "It is! And saying that says all. It is my love that stands between us and ourselves. It is my love that strangles in me all that would take from you the sacrifice you offer. It is my love that holds me fast to all that we may hope for now—submission. It is my love that saves us both!"

The air was thick and dark about him, but he saw her hands flung out towards him, whether in repudiation or entreaty he did not know. He caught them in his own and drew her to him, kissing her only once as he might have kissed her dead. He felt her figure relax and lose its tension as he held her, and then he laid her gently down.

A moment later, and from the darkness of the room he had passed into the blacker darkness of the world without.

BIJAPUR.

TWELVE miles of crumbling grass-grown ruins extend over the barren table-lands which border Portuguese territory in Western India, and the hoary domes and minarets, as they rise from the sea-like plain, appear as though painted in a visionary mirage on the blue canopy of the over-arching sky. The forlorn and deserted city enhances the melancholy aspect of the surrounding scenery, but the decaying splendour of the ruined capital indicates the former importance which belonged to the independent Mohammedan kingdom of Bijapur, founded in A.D. 1501 by a brother of Mahomed, the conqueror of Constantinople. The rapid growth of the mushroom metropolis was succeeded by a still more rapid decay, for in A.D. 1686, Aurungzebe, the Great Mogul, besieged Bijapur and put an end to the brief existence of the new monarchy, the work of destruction being completed by the Mahratta invaders who devastated the city with fire and sword. The sparse herbage and stunted thorn-bushes which spring from the unfruitful soil of the Deccan fail even to colour the monotonous grey of the dreary landscape,

and the desolate picture in its mournful frame strikes with chilling effect on eye and mind. Within a few paces of the primitive station stands the Bol Goomas, a moss-grown mosque, surmounted by a gigantic dome, and now fitted up as a Dâk Bungalow, where a turbaned Mohammedan presides over the comforts of the few travellers who turn aside from the beaten track to visit lonely Bijapur. With an irrepressible shiver at the thought of occupying this ghostly shrine, we leave bag and baggage in the echoing cloisters, and obtaining a dilapidated tonga with a still more dilapidated steed, set forth on a journey of exploration. The inhabitants of the city seem apathetic and poverty-stricken, and though a few turbaned sheiks, more or less fanatical, hang about grey tomb and ruined mosque, the scanty population of bullock-drivers, peasants, and idlers, scarcely look up from the broken walls where they lounge in utter indifference to the coming and going of the "Sahib lok." We drive through the deserted streets, amid a scene of general overthrow and ruin, to the great mosque of Ibrahim Roza, surrounded by a green garden and enclosed within lofty walls pierced by richly carved gateways. In the midst of the verdant lawns rises a noble stylobate of grey stone which supports the three wings of the building, separated from each other by an open space containing a broken fountain. The beauty of the mosque consists in a series of graceful domes of aerial lightness and perfect proportion, while the mausoleum, which serves as the *raison d'être* of this poetic sanctuary, combines colossal size and boldness of outline with extreme delicacy of superficial decoration.

A fortified outpost, known as Burg-i-Sharzah, the "Lion Bastion," and crowned by the famous gun, Maliki Maidan, "Lord of the Plain," the largest piece of ordnance in the world, commands a boundless prospect of the bleak and stony steppes. A keen wind waves the withered bents of the grassy hillock, and stirs the green tendrils of the tangled creepers which strive to veil the yawning mouth of the rusty cannon, large enough to contain the body of a giant. A solitary goat browses on the scanty pasture, and two brown children gaze at us with wondering eyes as they seat themselves on the machicolated walls which formerly defended the richest city of the Western Deccan. Huge blocks of stone and concrete strew the ground, relics of the final siege, which ended in the

complete subjugation of the capital, which was afterwards left, like Babylon of old, to the owls and to the bats, with all her pleasant palaces pillaged and destroyed.

Descending from the breezy height we drive to the Jama Masjid, the Moslem cathedral commenced in A.D. 1557 by Ali Adel Shah, but never completed, though continued by his successors on the same plan in the rare intervals of peace which befell the turbulent kingdom during the succeeding century. Even in its unfinished state, this majestic temple takes a prominent position amidst the Indian mosques of Islam. The beautiful Mehteri Mahal, or "Gate of the Sweeper," rich in traditional associations, and encrusted with delicate carving in transitional Indo-Saracenic style, makes a striking picture with the gloom of the wreathing arches brightened by a group of girls in orange and scarlet saris.

The mosque of "Asar-i-Sherif," "The Illustrious Relic," was built to contain a hair plucked from the beard of the Prophet, and the disproportionate size of the casket to the treasure enclosed, suggests the proverbial hunt for a needle in a haystack as a comparatively trifling task.

A superb verandah supported on richly carved wooden pillars sixty feet in height, forms the principal feature of this enormous edifice, adorned by Persian prayer-carpetts of exquisite design and glowing colours. The low chant of a dervish echoes mournfully through the stillness of the shadowy dome, and the leathern wings of a bat flap heavily from the arch of the marble Mihrab which faces Mecca, but the haunted silence of the mighty mosque seems emphasized rather than broken by the weird sounds which steal through the gloom. Legend and song immortalise the palmy days of Bijapur, and surround her ruined mosques and crumbling walls with an unfading wreath of memories. The heroic deeds of the Princess Chand, once Queen Dowager and Regent of the kingdom, are commemorated in the ballads of her native province, where her story still lingers on the lips of the gentle Hindu mother as she rocks the cradle or holds the distaff in the dusky lanes and narrow alleys of the mouldering and melancholy city. The courage and genius of this Royal heroine won the enthusiastic admiration of Akbar, the great Mogul, when his far-reaching ambition claimed possession of the Deccan, and demanded the subjugation of the independent southern kingdoms as tributaries

of the mighty northern empire. Bijapur was at the summit of prosperity when the regency of the Princess Chand expired, and the reins of government fell into the hands of the youthful monarch who then ascended the throne. The Mogul forces pressed continually forward towards the frontiers of the Deccan, and called on the King of Ahmednugger to submit to the imperial invader. The demand was refused, but the unfortunate sovereign was conquered and conveyed as a prisoner to the Court of Delhi, where he died in captivity. His son and successor had fallen in battle, but the Prime Minister of the deceased monarch prepared to oppose the claims of Akbar's son, who was marching to take possession of the vacant crown on behalf of a child of the Royal family.

Having fully prepared the city for a heavy siege, the command of it was given to the Princess Chand by the unanimous voice of Minister and people. Rising to the emergency with the prompt decision of a clear and powerful intellect, the heroic woman by means of letters and ambassadors so effectually roused the interest and co-operation of the neighbouring Princes, that a confederacy was formed on her behalf and every preparation made for sending an army of relief; but the active Moguls pressed forward the siege with unsparing energy, dreading the powerful combination formed against them, and desirous of obtaining a victory before the proposed league was successfully established. The brave Princess, clad in glittering armour, flew from post to post, inspiring her followers with her own courage and devotion, and winning the loyalty of every heart. She superintended the repairing of breaches and the strengthening of forts, cheered the despondent, controlled the rash, and welded together a thousand varying influences by the magnetism of her personality and the flame of her enthusiasm. Finding that the enemy was laying mines for the destruction of the city, she countermined, but an unexpected explosion occurred before the completion of the task, and about eighty feet of wall were thrown into the air, to the dismay of the disheartened garrison. The city would have immediately surrendered but for the noble example of the Princess Chand, who, throwing her veil over her face and calling upon the troops to follow her, leaped with drawn sword upon the yawning breach. Ordering the cannon to be dragged up after her, she directed the fire upon the

besieging army, and when ammunition failed, emptied her treasury of copper, silver, gold, and jewels, to feed the guns. The precious stores so lavishly sacrificed flashed through the smoke of battle, hurled with unremitting fury and deadly aim, until by nightfall the menacing chasm was filled by the dead who lay covered with the gems and precious metals heaped upon them. The Moguls, appalled by the persistency and bravery of the fierce defenders, at length withdrew their troops, and made a conditional peace with the patriots of the south, yielding an unwilling homage to the chivalrous Princess, who was afterwards regarded with the reverential awe which the Oriental pays to a divine incarnation.

The ballad poetry of the Deccan celebrates these deeds of almost Homeric fame, and also bears witness to the tender and loving heart of the southern Queen, by whom the meanest of her subjects was regarded as a sacred charge committed by Allah to her guardian care. The story of her career reaches a climax in the gallant defence which was brought to such a triumphant conclusion, and we search the pages of history in vain for records of her later years. "Happy is the nation which has no history," happier far the woman to whom the same proverb can be applied, and, from the lack of information respecting the future lot of the brave Princess Chand, it is generally assumed that when the necessity for public action was over, she relinquished the command of an army and the cares of official life, for the more congenial pursuits common to her sex. The respect which she won in an age when the strict seclusion of "purdah" was enforced upon the majority of womankind, proves the truth of the maxim enunciated in the great Sanskrit dramas of an earlier and purer epoch, that "the mantle of virtue is the strongest armour of a woman."

As we stroll through the ruined palaces where the departed monarchs of Bijapur reigned through the swiftly-passing years of the brief dynasty which rose with unparalleled splendour and faded like a storm-beaten flower, the tide of time rolls back, and imagination pictures the brilliant life of the provincial Court which once filled these silent halls with pageantry and pomp. The clustering domes of forsaken mosques and crumbling tombs alone remain as witnesses of past glory and forgotten fame, and the dust of ages lies thick upon the pages of the old-world chronicle studied

by the alien race which wrested the sceptres of India from Hindu and Moslem hands. The sunset splendour steals through the broken Saracenic arches, and lies in shafts of golden light on the marble pavement. A cloud of purple doves flutters home to roost in the shadowy niches of the great Gul Gombaz, or Rose Dome, the mausoleum of the seventh King of Bijapur, and the colossal sepulchre reflects the last pink flush of the radiant afterglow on the silvery sphere which is fluted like the crowding petals of an opening rose.

Tinkling goat-bells echo from the darkening plain where a shepherd drives his flock to a distant fold, and the cry of a muezzin rings from the airy height of a slender minaret as he calls the faithful to prayer; but the summons meets with no visible response in this city of ghosts and memories, where faith itself seems dead. Crossing the spacious courts of the ruined Arkilla, or inner fortress, we wend our way through the deepening shadows of the mysterious twilight to the desecrated mosque which "the flat-nosed Frank" now profanes to secular uses. The turbaned khansamah welcomes us with profound salaams, and we follow this degenerate son of the Prophet into the domed and vaulted interior, divided by wooden screens into bed-chambers and kitchens, with an echoing dining-hall beneath the central cupola. A night in a mosque is an unusual experience even amid the varied surroundings of Eastern travel, and it is a relief to hear that Her Majesty's representative, though only a juvenile sub-collector, is expected to take up his quarters in the desecrated sanctuary at a later hour. Our somewhat unfounded apprehensions are at once allayed, for under the official wing of the "Sahib lok" our security is unassailable; and, pending the arrival of the Government officer, we wander through court and cloisters, now bathed in a silver flood of moonlight which transfigures the scene with magical beauty. On the further side of the great stone quadrangle, a mighty tomb surrounded by arched galleries and crowned by a shimmering dome, rises on a marble pediment and dwarfs the neighbouring mosque with the gigantic proportions of its noble architecture. The sculptured doors stand open, and our entrance disturbs a colony of birds from their roosting-place on cornice and capital, from whence they flutter wildly away, wheeling round the dusky heights of the dome with terrified cries. A goat with two kids trotting by her side makes a rush for the open gateway

at the sight of the unaccustomed intruders; but our desire for new experiences is soon satisfied, and we beat a hasty retreat from the haunted spot, said to be the resting-place of some fair Mohammedan Queen.

Many traditions flow from unknown fountains into the great channels of history, and the general character of the legendary lore which belongs to Bijapur implies that a higher position was taken by the women of the province than was usual in an Indian State. The seclusion of the Mohammedan "purdah" has ever proved a less insuperable barrier to mental progress than the iron yoke of Hindu caste, and numerous instances are found in the annals of Oriental nations, where the more intellectual daughters of Islam have freed themselves from the bondage of custom and creed. No doubt exists that even the Aryan Hindus in early ages gave to women their true position. Polygamy was almost unknown, and the following lines quoted from the "Mahabharata," a ponderous Hindu epic of B.C. 500, represent the estimation in which Indian womanhood was then held:

A wife is half the man, his truest friend;
A loving wife is a perpetual spring
Of virtue, pleasure, wealth; a faithful wife
Is his best aid in seeking heavenly bliss.
A sweetly-speaking wife is a companion
In solitude—a father in advice,
A mother in all seasons of distress—
A rest in passing through life's wilderness.

The gradual descent of the moral standard may be traced from the pre-Vedic times during the age of conquest when the Aryans were ever pressing on toward south and west, and man falling farther away from the simplicity of childhood, until Brahminism had riveted the heavy links of the complex theological system on the people of India. The women suffered accordingly, and their complete captivity was consummated by the Mohammedan conquest, when in imitation of Moslem custom, and as a safeguard from the rapacity of the invader, the seclusion of women belonging to the higher classes became universal throughout the Indian peninsula.

The vengeance of the prophet fails to disturb our slumbers in the violated sanctuary of Islam, and through the glow of the roseate dawn we look for the last time upon the domes and minarets of deserted Bijapur. Women with brazen lotahs on their sleek dark heads stand round the broken fountain of the mossy quadrangle; silken-haired sheep follow a shepherd in flowing robes through an arched gateway wreathed with waving

ferns ; and a dervish spreads his prayer-carpet on the tessellated pavement, prostrating himself thrice towards Mecca as the sun rises above the distant horizon of the gray and lonely waste. The feeble remains of existence which still linger in Bijapur wake up to consciousness if not to actual life, and the beardless boy who represents the authority of the Imperial Government clatters off in state, with mounted police, and running syces clad in brilliant garb and bearing white wands of office. Our more humble vehicle follows in the wake of the scarlet-lined barouche and prancing Arabs, which dash through an admiring crowd gathered round the ruined gateway, and we bid a long farewell to the sad and sombre memorials of the buried past in the monumental city of the Deccan. Even the advent of the railway has hitherto failed to rouse Bijapur from the long sleep of two hundred years, and although strenuous efforts are being made by Government to clear away the mass of debris from the ruined Arkilla, with a view of utilising the ancient fortress for modern purposes, the herculean task is still unfinished.

THE STORY OF THE LAMP.

FROM the moment when people ceased to observe the regular bedtime of animated nature and began to sit up at nights, there began a new era in human affairs. We don't know much about that Palaeolithic man who hunted bears, and rhinoceros, and such small deer, about our primeval forests ; certainly not enough to say whether he used lamps or candles, or perforce contented himself with the ruddy glow of the fire, around which he would sit with his family, toasting mammoth marrow, or grilling hyena steaks or other toothsome morsels. Perhaps our primitive man was too fond of fat as an article of diet, to care to waste it in experiments, else he might easily have invented the rush light, so simple and primitive is it, and still made and used in primitive households such as you find now and then among the Welsh hills. A bundle of dried rushes dipped several times in melted mutton fat, there is all the process, and a capital miniature torch is the result, which the most boisterous winds can hardly extinguish. Now something of this kind our primitive man may have known how to make. If he had not arrived at his muttons, the fat of the cave bear or the bison might have served his turn.

Equally primitive is the lamp used by the Esquimaux during the continued night of the Arctic winter, which serves as cooking stove as well, and indeed constitutes the family hearth and the centre of the primitive household. And this is simply a shallow stone vessel along the edge of which is disposed a wick of dry moss. The oil supply is furnished by a lump of blubber which hangs near the flame, and drips till the oil is all extracted.

As simple in principle, though often finely shaped and of excellent design, are the lamps of bronze and clay that have come down to us from antiquity. Underground London is rich in these relics of a buried civilisation, and a varied collection of Roman lamps which have been dug up in excavations about the City may be seen any day at the Guildhall museum. They are all of the same simple nature—although of every possible design—a receptacle for oil, and an aperture through which the wick is passed, the latter formed of a few twisted threads. The only device for increasing the quantity of light was to add to the number of wicks. The best of these lamps can have given but a feeble light, and that wavering and smoky, and infinitely dull and dreary must the long winter nights of our rigid climate have seemed to colonists from sunny Italy.

As for the ever-burning lamps of mediæval romance, lamps that glowed unextinguished for centuries, whether in the heart of Egyptian pyramids, or in the tombs of mighty emperors, kings, or warlocks—as in the tomb of Michael Scott,

That lamp shall burn unquenchably
Until the eternal doom shall be,

these belong to the borderland of the mystic and marvellous ; and to the same region belong the magic lamps that are served by demon or genie, such as that of our old friend Aladdin.

For a long series of centuries the lamp seems to fall into disuse, anyhow for domestic purposes. The porter bears a torch to see who is knocking at the castle gate ; and about the courtyard doubtless

Full many a torch and cresset glared ;

but a dainty taper burnt in my lady's bower, or glimmered in the casement to light the lover to his tryst, where in other days Hero would have lit her classic lamp. The Church encouraged the use of candles, and while chandlers in wax and tallow increased and flourished, the craft of the lamp-maker was almost extinguished. The lamp sur-

vived only in the form of a horn lantern that hung about stable-yards, dimly burning among carriers and hostlers.

As for public lamps, their day was yet to come, and began to dawn soon after that grand flare-up, the burning of Whitehall Palace, which indirectly hastened its appearance. For the Court removing to Kensington, the constant traffic by day and night between London and that dark and remote suburb suggested the establishment of a row of oil lamps along the greater part of the way. And this long festoon of feeble lights impressed the imagination of the period as something wonderfully gay and festive; and the contrast of their own dim streets inspired the citizens with a desire for something equally brilliant. But the story of public lighting has really little to do with the history of the lamp, for no definite improvement resulted from its connection with the public service, and when the oil lamp was finally superseded by the gas flare in the public streets, it was just the feeble, ineffective implement it had always been.

In domestic lighting, for nearly the first half of the present century, candles held almost undisputed sway. Old stagers may yet recall the dimly lighted parlour, the fire burning softly in the twilight, where the elders kept blind man's holiday. The bell is rung and Mary brings in candles, a pair of moulds in tall brass candlesticks brightly polished, with snuffers on a tray, sharp-beaked snuffers of steel, with jaws that opened and shut with a snap, and something sinister in their appearance. There were plated candlesticks and snuffers too for occasions of state, with silver branches that suggested the spoils of Jerusalem. But there was also a lamp, a stately edifice of bronze that towered over the family circle at times, and shed a generous and genial light when so inclined. But what a demon it was to smoke, and to smell! And it would burn, when it condescended to burn at all, nothing but the very finest sperm oil at a fabulous price per gallon.

The Argand burner, with circular wick and central air supply, and a close glass chimney that powerfully increased combustion, was the first great advance upon the primitive oil lamp. But viscid animal and vegetable oils do not rise freely enough to support such increased combustion, when merely drawn upwards by the capillary attraction of the fibres of the wick. A supply of oil must be kept up almost close

to the flame. Here was the crux of the lamp-maker, a difficulty met in many ingenious ways, the most successful of which was the French "Moderator," in which the oil was forced upwards by spring and piston, the machinery being wound up like a clock at frequently recurring periods. France, too, from its broad stretches of yellow-flowered colza, furnished the oil which practically held the field during long years of the middle Victorian period.

With all its faults, and they were many, the old "Moderator" lamp was a pleasant, attractive object, and its cheerful light seemed an emblem of calm domestic peace and modest prosperity. It was pre-eminent in country houses, and shone with gentle radiance in districts far remote from noisy streets and the meretricious glare of gas. It was mild, innocuous, charming. It never blew up; you might upset it, there would be a smash and a mess, but no coroner's inquest to follow. But it is gone, swept away with all its fellows, by the oil of the period, the all-conquering petroleum.

Now the genie of the old oil lamp was of a friendly, pacific nature; it had accompanied the human race in its many changes and wanderings, and had never done it harm. But the spirit of the petroleum lamp—call it by whatever name you please—is of a totally different character. Your lamp is to it a prison from which if it escapes it will spread fire and destruction around. But we can't go back, if we would, to the old harmless method. Petroleum is everywhere the conqueror, and the old models have disappeared. Too old-fashioned for use but not old enough for a museum, they linger for a while in the shop of the marine-store dealer, and finally disappear into the limbo of old rubbish.

In petroleum lamps German invention took the lead. It was a German notion that a broad flat wick could be drawn into a circular burner, and thus all complications avoided. And the simple "Berlin burner," now so cheap, and so universally spread, is a very excellent model, much safer than the ordinary flat burner, and even if upset it rarely causes a conflagration. It is not perfect, however, for the wick is raised unevenly by the pinions, and sometimes the whole machinery sticks fast. The inventor who could devise a simple means of raising and lowering the wick evenly all round, would deserve well of his country and should receive a civic crown.

It is the little common lamp with the flat burner, that is so destructive of human life. Hardly a day passes but some victim to what is called a lamp explosion is carried to the hospitals. On a moderate computation it is found that at least three hundred deaths a year occur in London alone owing to lamp accidents. A very small part of these are due to actual explosions. In the crowded rooms of the poor, with children moving about, the little rickety lamp is easily upset, and as easily the contents catch fire and destroy a little holocaust of victims. Or if the lamp should be neglected like the family in general, perhaps, and dust, dead flies, and congealed oil have collected about the burner, then as it is moved about it catches fire internally, the terrified bearer throws it down, and a conflagration follows. If the lives that are lost singly and unnoticed were lost in one fell catastrophe, all the country would be aroused, and would demand that some means should be taken to protect these poor victims from a painful, agonising death. And invention should surely be able to give us a safety lamp on the same cheap, effective scale as the engines of destruction which are now found in so many homes.

For this has become the "age of lamps." Everywhere they abound—tall, stately affairs rising from the floors of elegantly furnished saloons—shining with subdued radiance behind curtains of silk; resting beside the whirring sewing-machine on the table of the poor sempstress. They crowd the windows of shops devoted to their cult; they go round the world in ships' cabins; they burn underground in mines of gold and diamonds; and wherever civilisation goes they penetrate, and often a good way beyond. As well try to stop the flow of the tide as the progress of petroleum. But we might make it a little safer for our own people. There should be no touch of tragedy in the story of the lamp.

JANET.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

JUST beyond the heart of the City there stands a grey square. Tufts of young grass grow up amongst its quiet stones, and the hand of spring touches into leaf and blossom the trees of its old garden. At one period the élite of the City had lived in this square, but later on fashion ebbed from it and flowed in a great tide westward.

Still there lingered about the high old houses a pathetic air of past grandeur.

They were mostly inhabited by struggling young professional men, or solitary ladies with long pedigrees and limited incomes. But the large middle house in the square was an exception to the rule. It had been converted into a very select Library with all modern accessories; everything arranged in the very best style, and with the most correct taste. This Library was the pet hobby of a company of retired citizens. It had originated with them; they were its parents, so to speak, and under their united wings it had been fostered. They watched over it and tended it with the care of a mother over an only child. It was their delight to make it a thing complete of its kind, to beautify and add to its charms yearly, and above all things to keep it very select. The retired citizens were proud of their Library, and they were boastfully proud of their librarian. He was, indeed, a man of no small renown. The name of Francis Peterkin was as well known in the courts of all learned Universities as amongst the inhabitants of his native city. Albeit, he was a shy, reserved man, carrying his weight of learning very humbly—a man of few words and, like the Apostle Paul, of no great bodily presence. Mr. Peterkin had neither kith nor kin, and lived his life in a world of books, very much, it was said, at the mercy of a house-keeper.

Nevertheless, he was acknowledged to be one of the finest Egyptian scholars in Great Britain, if not in Europe. When savants from foreign capitals visited the City, they never failed to find out the select Library, and to pay their respects to Mr. Peterkin. The Library had quite a rich roll of distinguished names upon its visitors' book. The committee hugged themselves upon the possession of their librarian. As a mere matter of fact, a man of poorer parts might better have filled the post, but, on the other hand, the committee felt assured that no other modern library could boast of a Francis Peterkin, and therefore were they joyfully willing to pay for the honour.

As time passed on, however, it was discovered that Mr. Peterkin, although everything that could be desired in the way of learning, had yet no great interest in the lighter books of fiction. And light books of fiction were in constant demand from the select Library.

To rectify this trifling defect an assistant had been elected, and it was to replace this

assistant—lately called to a larger sphere in London—that the committee held many long and important meetings.

One blustering March afternoon Mr. Paton and Colonel Jefferson were closeted in the handsome business room of the Library. Mr. Paton stood upon the hearthrug, his hands beneath his coat-tails, balancing his portly figure thoughtfully on his heels and toes. The Colonel occupied an arm-chair, the while with a penknife he delicately scraped his faultless finger-nails.

"Of course it's an innovation," said Mr. Paton. "Really, quite now, what one might call an innovation."

"Decidedly so," said the Colonel, closing his knife and returning it to his waistcoat-pocket. Colonel Jefferson had lived in the very best Anglo-Indian society, and spoke in a deep voice, swallowing his words in large military mouthfuls. "What does Peterkin say about it? What does he think of a female librarian?"

The March wind lifted up its voice with a hoot and blew a volume of smoke down the chimney.

"Tut, tut, tut," exclaimed Mr. Paton, frowning and stepping forward a pace. "Now, why are these chimneys allowed to be in that wretched state? Positively, it's a disgrace, it is indeed; I must bring up the matter before the committee.—Peterkin! oh, Peterkin says very little. It's as difficult to know what Peterkin really thinks as—ha! here he is! How d'ye do, Mr. Peterkin? Speak of an angel—you know the rest, my dear sir. We were just discussing this new arrangement."

The librarian came forward, puckering up his short-sighted eyes, and bowing silently, as he shook hands with the two gentlemen.

"You don't—er—positively dislike the idea of a young lady assistant, Mr. Peterkin?"

The librarian walked to the round centre table, and, turning his back upon the representatives of the committee, lifted up a book and examined it.

"Has she passed examinations?" he asked abruptly.

"Examinations! Well, really now," Mr. Paton thoughtfully stroked his chin, "a very pertinent question, my dear sir; so much naturally depends upon examinations—but, really now, upon my word I can scarcely say. You don't know, Colonel, eh?"

"No," said the Colonel shortly.

"No! She's a most intelligent and well-

educated young lady, that I can vouch for—a daughter of one of our late highly esteemed physicians. You knew Dr. Muir? Every one knew Dr. Muir."

Mr. Peterkin silently nodded, with his eyes still fastened upon the book.

"Yes, of course, my dear sir. He died young, that is comparatively young, leaving his widow and family not over well provided for. Too generous, they say, to look after his own interests—a great mistake I call it. Mrs. Muir I have had the pleasure of meeting—a most charming and cultivated woman, and like mother like daughter, you know. The younger one is studying medicine—a fine-looking girl, but rather—well, what all these medical ladies are—rather advanced in views, don't you know—a thing I don't at all approve of. However, Miss Kate is not in the question. The older daughter, Miss Muir, being wishful to do some work, and being so well educated, and—and altogether pleasant—a wee bit of a favourite of mine, I confess—"

Mr. Paton made this statement in parenthesis and looked distinctly coy for an instant, but quickly drew himself together again.

"Well, and that, taken in conjunction with the fact of young Clayton leaving us, made the committee seriously consider the question and finally see their way to offer the post to Miss Muir, if—of course, entirely if, my dear Mr. Peterkin, the step meets with your approval?"

Mr. Paton having talked himself short of breath, paused interrogatively.

The librarian merely lifted another book and held it close to his short-sighted eyes, while the two members of committee eyed him, waiting patiently until he should be moved to speech.

"You wouldn't make the want of examinations a serious drawback?" queried Mr. Paton anxiously.

"I should call it an advantage," said Mr. Peterkin with unusual decision, throwing down his book. "This generation is over-ridden with examinations."

He walked towards the door.

"When would she be able to come?" he asked, with his hand upon it.

"As soon as you like," they answered simultaneously.

"The sooner the better," he said, and with a bow, which was abbreviated by the closing of the door, he went out.

"Well, now, really, I am relieved," exclaimed Mr. Paton, rubbing his hands. "There's been no fuss or botheration;

Peterkin's taken it quite easily—like an angel, I may say."

"And why shouldn't he?" said the Colonel, getting up and stretching himself.

"Oh, well, you know, Peterkin's Peterkin, and between ourselves"—Mr. Paton lowered his voice confidentially—"he's a bit of a woman-hater, is Peterkin. All these very clever men are, more or less. They don't seem to care much for the fair sex somehow; can't be bothered with them, I suppose."

"Pooh!" said the Colonel irreverently, drawing out his watch. "The creature doesn't exist."

"The which? I beg your pardon, my dear sir."

"The person you referred to; I say he doesn't exist."

The Colonel yawned and walked towards the window.

"Ha, it's fair now; I must be off to my club; have an appointment there at five o'clock."

But long after Colonel Jefferson had left the library, Mr. Paton still possessed the hearthrug, deeply cogitating.

Two days afterwards the new assistant appeared. She was of medium height, looking younger than her twenty-three years by reason of a slight and willowy figure, and with that delicate youthfulness of soul which most often accompanies a fine and sensitive nature. She had shy brown eyes, and a charming mass of ruddy brown hair coiled round her head. There was nothing remarkably striking in her appearance, beyond a certain indefinable maidenliness which better made itself felt than described.

"Not at all gay or flighty," said the committee, smiling approvingly upon one another.

Mr. Peterkin made one of his silent old-fashioned bows when the young assistant was introduced to him, but otherwise scarcely seemed to notice her.

"So like Peterkin," remarked Mr. Paton to himself indulgently, and he felt impelled to say aloud:

"Miss Muir has never filled a like post before, Mr. Peterkin. You will, perhaps, kindly show her by a word, quite by a word, my dear sir, what are—er—in fact, what the duties are."

"I shall try to learn quickly," said the girl, flushing timidly. "I shall wish to do my best."

The librarian lifted a swift glance to her face, and then let his eyes fall.

"Oh, the duties are not heavy," he said, with a melancholy droop in his voice. "I dare say Miss Muir will find them all out for herself."

But this was a thing not so easily done as Mr. Peterkin seemed to think. As Miss Muir walked home in the early dusk of the spring evening, she reflected that the day had been the longest in her life; for the work was entirely novel to the girl, and to ask any directions of Mr. Peterkin demanded from her a mighty moral effort.

The young librarian's home stood in one of those highly respectable dull streets which, like so many arms and legs, stretch out of the heart of the City and run into its growing suburbs. It was a dull house outwardly, but inside there was a delightful atmosphere—the delicious warmth of a real home.

Her family welcomed her return with open arms.

"Tell me a story, Jennie," demanded Hughie, the little lame autocratic brother on the sofa, the moment she entered.

Hughie lived upon as much as might support a small-sized bird, but possessed a voracious appetite for fairy tales.

"Now, Hughie, don't worry. Poor thing, it's tired. It must have tea first," said Kate, who was twenty and a medical student. "Eat, drink, strong-minded woman of the family."

The mother said little, but she smiled upon her daughter very tenderly, and with soft mother's lips kissed her forehead.

"Tired, little Janet?"

The strong-minded woman embraced all her family very joyfully, and sat down with a deep sigh of content.

"How good it is to be home again! Almost worth having been away. Mother, mavourneen, how is the head?"

"Better, dear," she answered cheerfully.

"Now don't talk to us until you have eaten something."

"I have been in the Desert of Sahara all day," said Janet gaily, "and home's like a great rock in a weary land. 'In the shadow of this teapot I sit down with much delight.' Oh, it is good!" And she drank three cups of tea.

"Now," cried Hughie, lifting up his little impatient voice. "Now, Jennie, you've had enough. Begin the story now. I like Jennie's stories," he sighed, settling himself back on his pillows in luxurious expectancy.

"But how shall I begin, Hughikins?" she asked, going over beside him and

laying her soft cheek caressingly against his fair head.

"Begin 'once upon a time.' I like that sort of way best."

"But I'm too stupid to-night, Hughie, for 'once upon a time.' You can't think how woolly my head feels! Ask me questions instead."

"What about the librarian?" interposed Kate, who was seated at a side table with a selection of books and bones spread out in front of her. "Dr. Anna Burns knows him. She says he's tremendously clever. Did not you shake in your shoes before him?"

The smile curved Janet's red lips very charmingly.

"I did shake a little, but not—I hope—not very visibly. Mr. Paton was mentally holding me up by the hand and encouraging me."

Kate tilted back her chair and laughed.

"How exactly like Mr. Paton! Aggravating man! I verily believe he would pat an archangel on the head, if he got the chance, and call him 'my dear sir,' or 'my good young friend.' Not that I mean that you are an archangel, my dear, or myself either, for that matter. I never meet him but he says: 'Well, Miss Kate, and how do the medical studies get on?' with a look of intense, disapproving patronage on his satisfied face."

Kate took up two bones and pressed them lovingly against the rich bloom of her cheek.

"No, I'm distinctly not a favourite of Mr. Paton's. He thinks me most unlady-like—a bold, bad person because I study you, dear old bones. And, sad to say, I don't care a button, and I don't care a fig."

"But all the same, he means well," said Janet, smiling eagerly. "He is really quite, quite kind at heart."

Kate gave her shoulders a naughty shrug.

"Oh, Janet, Janet, why will you be so abominably charitable? Why cannot you let a creature abuse another creature in happiness and peace? Well, we shan't discuss our dear, amiable friend. 'Revenons à nos moutons.' What like is the great librarian?"

"Oh, really not very terrible at all; quite a small, harmless man, baldish, and— and short-sighted, I think, because he half closes his eyes—so!" Janet puckered up her pretty eyes in imitation of Mr. Peterkin. "He is rather like a sparrow; a

lonely, quiet sparrow—not a chirping sparrow," she added thoughtfully.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Kate, in interested tones. "Bald, and like a lonely sparrow, is he? You don't say so! Well, well, very clever people always do seem disappointing in the matter of looks. I wonder why that should be?"

"Yes, like a sparrow," continued Janet dreamily, taking up her parable. "But not one that has ever chirped in the spring-time. The miracle of a new heaven and a new earth has never unfolded itself to him. He is like one of the poor little stuffed birds in the Museum. If he ever sang, it must have been in a primeval existence—a prehistoric age. But that is only my very humble opinion," she said, waking up, "and I am liable to err, as every one knows."

"Of course," assented Kate, "being but mortal, more's the pity. Mother, you and I must form no mental portrait of Mr. Peterkin from Janet's words. We must leap to no conclusions."

"But what do you do, Jennie?"

"I find out where all the books live, Hughikins. I am the servant of the books, and when their friends or acquaintances call for them, I say 'at home,' or 'not at home,' as the case may be. It is very splendid to be beside so many books. And they are all well-dressed books, too. I do like books in nice coats. But it's a temptation. One does so wish to sit down and read them all."

"Lucky little doggie!" sighed Kate. "But yield not to temptation, for if you do, it may turn you out of the Library."

"Thanks, Dr. Kate," Janet laughed gaily, and going over to the hearthrug, knelt down beside her mother.

"Mother, she said, her voice falling softly, "do you know, some of our dear old books were there. It almost made me cry to see them again."

"I know, my dear. It was kind and generous of the committee to buy them from us after father—went away."

The mother and daughter sat silent for a little while with clasped hands. Their friendship was of that perfect kind which needs no words.

The firelight flickering up shone upon the two faces, and showed how like they were to one another: the same sweetness of the mouth and eyes, the same refined and gentle expression which yet betokened no weakness, and, pervading all, that rare and youthful hopefulness of soul, which

neither time nor sorrow can ever kill. But the mother's face had deep lines where the daughter's was still fair and smooth. The girl looked into the leaping fire, with eyes that shone through tears.

"It was because they loved father," she said softly. "Every one did. Oh, I am proud—very proud—to be his daughter."

CHAPTER II.

JANET speedily grew into the ways and work of the Library. She had a very real love and reverence for books, therefore the care of them was a pleasure to her. She took delight in it.

The old and the young librarian could not be said to hold much conversation. In the case of Mr. Peterkin the tongue was not an unruly member, and Janet was too shy to break through the wall of silence which environed him. Nevertheless, that intangible feeling which must of necessity grow up between two persons brought much in contact with one another, was not one of unfriendliness.

As the young librarian worked busily on the bright spring mornings over a new catalogue of books, the gentle gaiety of her heart broke out in happy snatches of song, and the fresh lilt of the young voice spread into Mr. Peterkin's room, touching him quaintly in the midst of his learned researches as when one is greeted by the perfume of a forgotten flower in an old volume.

"I hope my singing does not disturb you," she asked of him timidly one morning, standing at his door with a sudden consciousness of crime.

He started from his stooping posture over his desk.

"No—no, Miss Muir, certainly not. Pray continue if you care. I—I do not dislike it."

"Quite truly?" she said, smiling up at him eagerly.

"Quite truly," he repeated, with a flash of answering smile.

Now Mr. Peterkin's smile was a very delightful thing. It illuminated not his face alone, but his whole being, and while it remained, he was, for the time, clothed in a very goodly youth.

But unhappily Mr. Peterkin's smile was, like his speech, but seldom used. It sent Janet back to her cataloguing fearlessly, and with a great surprise that the librarian should look "so altogether nice and human-like."

The committee congratulated themselves heartily on the choice of an assistant librarian.

"So quiet, so ready, with such a keen interest in books, and withal such a perfect lady." Mr. Paton led the chorus of praise. "And then"—but this was in confidence—"her salary, of course, very much less than young Clayton had received; for naturally, being but a woman, she could not expect so much."

"And much better to look at," quoth the Colonel, in his deep voice, "than most of those blue young women."

"Oh, well, well," said Mr. Paton, rather shocked, "beauty and brains do not always go together. For my own part, I consider too much brain a mistake in ladies; encroaching on man's prerogative, don't you know. But beauty of course. 'Tis to woman we give the palm in beauty," he added with great gallantry.

The Colonel only grunted, for Mr. Paton had the criminal faculty of boring his acquaintances very terribly. Many a black-hearted villain had more friends than he.

One morning, Janet, reluctant yet courageous, stood at Mr. Peterkin's door and knocked. When, in answer to his brief "Come in," she entered, she found him standing up, and, with obvious difficulty, drawing on his overcoat.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with an involuntary grimace of pain. "My enemy is upon me again."

"Let me help you," she cried impulsively, coming forward. "Is it rheumatism?"

"Ay, rheumatism," he answered, with a groan. "Thanks. What I shall do, if it incapacitates me for work, I cannot think."

He spoke with that sudden burst of frankness which besets the most reserved natures at times, looking at her almost appealingly, as if for sympathy. His eyes were wide open, and she observed for the first time that they were of a deep and beautiful grey. The brown and the grey eyes were on a level, and for a moment they met. Then Janet stepped back, and leaning her slight figure against the table, looked at him with a gaze full of grave pity.

"I am very sorry," she said gently. "Father had a powder he recommended for rheumatism, but I cannot remember its name." She ruffled her forehead in perplexed thought. "How stupid of me to forget! I shall ask mother. Have you ever tried a—a sort of powder, Mr. Peterkin?"

"No, but anything your father prescribed I should be pleased to try." He took up his hat, brushing it carefully with his sleeve, and peering into the crown of it for a moment. "He was a most worthy man; I—I had a very high regard for your father, Miss Muir." This he said with a jerk, and, turning from her abruptly, with a hurried bow, left the room.

"But it was nice of him to say that about father," thought Janet, with a warm glow of the heart. "I must remember to ask mother about that powder thing. But, oh, dear," with a start of recollection, "he has gone, and I have forgotten to enquire about Mr. Paton's book."

The life in the Library might have been monotonous, but the constant coming and going of visitors kept it busy and lively. Underlying the gentle seriousness of Janet's nature there was a fine spirit of humour, not known to all, with a power of graphic description, which made her keep Hughie enthralled for hours by stories, real or imaginary, of the different people whom she met.

"But, Jennie, do they see you laughing?" the little fellow asked anxiously.

"Oh, no, my Hughikins. I am only Miss Muir, the assistant librarian; what the dear, fat old ladies call 'a quiet, civil-spoken young person.' They don't know the real creature inside me."

"Does the Sparrow know, Jennie?"

"The Sparrow!" Janet hesitated for an instant. "The Sparrow is very wise, my little boy blue, but he lives most of his days within a cage—a cage with thick bars and locked doors—and it is only at very rare moments that he hops out and we meet—which reminds me, mother, about rheumatism. Mr. Peterkin suffers from rheumatism. Now, what is a cure?"

"The sting of bees," said Kate, beginning to laugh, "is the latest prescription. But if you had had the politeness to consult me, which you have not had, I should tell you candidly there is no cure. However, go your own way; seek advice elsewhere."

"So I shall," returned her sister. "Your advice is too dismal, Dr. Kate! Mother, what was the name of that powder father used to prescribe?"

"Salicyne, my dear; but I scarcely think he considered it a cure, only it helped in some cases."

"I shall tell Mr. Peterkin about it, anyhow; that is, if my little scrap of courage does not forsake me before to-morrow. My Hughikins, you must never

grow very learned, or I shall be too afraid to speak to you."

As days passed by, other visitors came to the Library, but from these Janet greatly recoiled, shrinking even from any mention of their names. Most of the committee had sons—gay, idle young fellows, who were, as a rule, very able and quite willing to spend the money their fathers had made. They had laughed at the Library hobby as a senseless craze of the old fogies, but when the new librarian appeared, they found it necessary to saunter in of an afternoon and to enquire assiduously for books which they had no desire to read. To win the heart of a pretty woman, by wile or guile, was what these young gentlemen considered excellent sport—the more difficult to obtain, the keener the pursuit. And bets had been laid as to how long the pretty librarian could withstand the blandishments of young Jefferson.

In the sheltered life of the girl's home she had been as carefully guarded from insult of word or look as any princess; she feared no evil because she knew none, and she was, at first, too surprised and bewildered to understand what it meant. But when the Colonel's son cast his languishing gaze upon her, or took some desired volume from her with hateful lingering pressure of the hand, her soft cheek burned with an inexpressible feeling of insult and indignation, and she turned from him haughtily, with a fine lift of the maiden head. She loathed his presence, and his attentions were abhorrent to her, but in the high pride of her heart she could not stoop to mention them to any creature. For under heaven there is, in truth, no pride so great as that of a pure-hearted maid.

He had followed her into the inner library one afternoon under pretext of wishing some obsolete French work. As Janet stretched up her hand to the shelf to lift it down, he threw his arm around her waist in rude embrace and attempted to kiss her. In a moment she wrenched herself from his clasp, and with white cheeks and blazing eyes pointed to the door.

"Go!" she said.

"Ah, Miss Muir, don't be so hard on a fellow, now. 'Pon my soul, a pretty girl shouldn't be so cruel."

But she looked at him with the scathing, pitiless scorn of her girl's eyes, and said "Go" again.

Then young Jefferson, having the meagre sufficiency of grace to feel that she was as

completely removed from him as if a guard of seraphs railed her round, with the bravado of a bow slunk from her presence.

Janet sank down on the library steps; she was trembling, but now a deep red stain scorched each cheek. She sat alone. The round-faced clock on the wall beat out the burning moments, heavy with throbbing shame.

In his own private room Mr. Peterkin was seated, critically examining the latest edition on Egyptian mythology. Suddenly he lifted his head and appeared to listen intently. Then he rose and entered the library.

Janet started at the sound of the opening door, but kept her eyes fixed on him with a wide-open, defiant look, all foreign to their soft darkness.

Mr. Peterkin stopped short and hesitated.

"What—what—is it?" he stammered.

"You are ill, Miss Muir?"

"Thanks, no! I am not ill," she replied, in a curiously slow and distinct voice.

Mr. Peterkin walked uncertainly towards the book-shelves and carefully selected a book. Her heart seemed to be beating more loudly than the clock.

"You are alone," he said, holding the book up to his face. "I fancied I heard Colonel Jefferson's voice. I rather wished to consult him about—a matter."

"It was his son," she said coldly. "He has gone."

"Ah!" He made no further remark, but after a few long moments replaced the book upon its shelf. At the door he spoke again. "If you care to go home now, of course you may. I shall be happy to attend to any one who may come."

Janet lifted her head higher.

"Thank you, you are most kind, but I am perfectly well. There is really no necessity for me to leave."

Mr. Peterkin bowed in silence. His face wore a puzzled, almost dazed expression as he re-entered his room. He took two or three turns up and down the floor, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Probably a man looks more markedly youthful in this attitude than in any other, but it was curious to note how absolutely boyish Mr. Peterkin appeared. At the end of one of these turns he came opposite his book, still lying open upon the desk. Catching sight of it, he stopped short, and sighed, for no very obvious reason. It was safe anchorage. A few minutes later on, with his shoulders well hunched up, he

was bending over it, to all appearance thoroughly immersed in the lore of the Egyptians.

But Janet sat motionless for a long time on the library steps, her sensitive soul quivering with its insult. It hurt her more keenly than any physical pain. She felt debased and lowered; she who had held her head so modestly high in the fearlessness of her maidenhood. The hot tears gathered in her eyes and scalded them, but she scorned to let them fall, clenching her slender hand with the effort to drive them back.

Like a veil over the City fell the soft-dropping twilight, and a great white-faced witch of a moon was stepping slowly up the heavens as Janet walked homewards. In the garden of the square there was a delicate, fragrant perfume of young summer. The greening of the trees was breaking into a mist of white and lilac blossom. From out the mystery of their shadow quivered the sudden, sweet note of a solitary bird.

A drunken man, reeling home and clinging as he went to the railings, turned and struck his upbraiding wife a heavy blow.

"You brute!" she shrieked at him with curses.

The blow fell on Janet's heart.

"Oh, heaven! heaven!" she prayed, smiting her hands together.

Little children in the streets were calling to each other, and playing their childhood's immortal games. Janet saw them dirty, and ragged, and forlorn. She could not believe to-night that they were happier than crowned kings.

The lamplighter going on his twinkling rounds; the first faint star pricking out through the thoughtful sky; the rattle of passing carriages; the cheery lights flashing from the shop windows; the housewife with her brown marketing basket; all the many common sights and sounds of life which had formerly touched the girl's quick fancy, now rose up only to sadden her. Deep down at the world's heart she felt the great human sore.

"Tell me a story about a Prince," said Hughie that evening.

"My dear Hughie, there are no Princes. The race is extinct."

"But make them up, Jennie, out of your own head."

"There are no Princes in my head, Hughie."

The boy's lip quivered. He was a gentle, imaginative child, passionately fond of his sister, and, it may have been, spoilt a little.

by sickness and the indulgent love of his home.

"You know I like the people that are not real best, Jennie."

Then Janet's heart melted, and she gathered him up in her tender arms.

"My head aches so badly to-night, Hughikins," she whispered. "Wait until to-morrow like a good boy, and I shall tell you two lovely long stories about the most splendid Princes, who are not a bit like real people."

Something in his sister's voice made the little fellow look up puzzled.

"There are real Princes still, although common people don't always see their crowns. You've often said so, Jennie."

"Perhaps it was a mistake, then," she answered sadly. "There was once one, and he was our father, and now he is dead."

"Janet a pessimist!" exclaimed Kate, gathering up her books, "or do my long ears deceive me? My dear, the cloak sits upon you most unbecomingly. Sweetness and light are your dress; leave pessimism to lanky, long-faced students like myself."

Later on in the evening when Hughie had been tucked in his little white bed, the mother came and bent over Janet.

"What's the matter with my own old daughter?" she said caressingly.

"Mother, I ache," said the girl simply. "Oh, mother, mother," she cried, raising herself from Hughie's sofa and holding out her arms. "Love me to-night, mother. Love me as if I were a little child again."

Then her mother, asking no questions, cradled the brown head on her tender bosom and crooned over her soft inarticulate words of love; and Janet grew comforted.

Young Jefferson came no more to the select Library. The game was up. And when his companions went, they found themselves confronted by the silent, spare librarian. Mr. Peterkin gave no sign that he was conscious of what had occurred. He may have had his surmises or he may not. More than any other man I ever knew did Mr. Peterkin possess the wise gift of silence. But, whenever the strident voices and vacant laughter of these young gentlemen were heard approaching the library, the senior librarian's door as certainly swung open and he appeared.

And in the delicate reticence, which yet remained unbroken, Janet's heart drew near and thanked him with a great gratitude too deep for words.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "*The Thirteenth Brydain*," "*Catherine Maidment's Burden*," "*Benefit of Clergy*," "*The Vicar's Aunt*," etc. etc.

CHAPTER IX.

"12, Bryanston Street, June 26.

"DEAREST OLD JACK,—The letter I sent you last night was so short and stupid that I must send you one line to-day to say how sorry I am. I had been out all the afternoon—you know I told you it was my first 'afternoon out'—I went to the New Gallery, and it was hot there and dull, and I got late and hurried back, so you got the benefit, you poor dear boy, of my crossness and tiredness. I was so vexed when I had sent that cross letter to you. For, dear Jack, I didn't mean a word I said when I said I couldn't put up with this life. In the bottom of her naughty heart your Richie is quite, quite content, and really happy in her work. Do remember that and believe it in spite of all I said, won't you, please? I'm getting on all right, too, I am indeed. The children are ducks, all three of them. I think I love Brian best, because he's just a little like what the twins were when they were quite small.

"But I love them all. And I think they're really fond of me. Mrs. Fitzgerald varies, of course; every one does. Still, I think she's satisfied and knows that I do my best to please her. Nothing dreadful has happened to the children since I wrote to you last week. I'm so very thankful! I think as we've gone on smoothly for a nice long time, Mrs. Fitzgerald really trusts me. And that, of course, makes me as happy as happy. Do tell me, when you write on Thursday, a little more about yourself than your last letter did. And do believe, my dearest old boy, that I didn't mean one single word of my note. I'm as happy as I ever can be, till you and I and the others can be together, I am indeed.—Your most loving sister,
"RICHIE."

Richenda read over her letter carefully as she laid down her pen. She was quite alone in the nursery; and when she had finished it, she gave a hasty kiss to the part of the sheet where she had written her brother's name, before she folded it and put it into its envelope.

It was half-past nine in the same evening on which the children had been in their mother's boudoir. They were now, naturally, asleep; Mrs. Fitzgerald would not be in until

late, and Richenda was altogether her own mistress. She had come home from the New Gallery on the previous day feeling wretched, and sore at heart, and resentful. She hardly knew why; she certainly had no definite reason, she told herself, for feeling bitterly hurt by Sir Roderick Graeme. He had behaved perfectly politely and perfectly naturally. Each time she said this to herself, however, it had brought less conviction and more resentment; a resentment that seemed to influence for the time all she had to do with. And when, later in the evening, she had settled down to write her weekly letter to her eldest brother, the note, which was all she had been able to bring herself to write, contained the very last things she would have said to him on any other occasion. She had sent it off without even reading it over; but when it was gone she had so immediately repented of having written it, that her first action that morning had been to get leave to go out to post a second letter at night—a letter she meant to write to cancel the vague unhappiness that the first had contained. It was this letter which now, in her first leisure, she had written.

She fastened the envelope, stamped it, and then went with quick steps into the large room where she slept with the children, to get her things, that she might go to the post with it.

Richenda almost always went to the post herself with her letters if possible. It was easy enough for her to get leave to do this in the evenings, and she enjoyed the opportunity thus obtained of a short escape from her daily surroundings into the cool evening air; and the enjoyment had the added charm of solitariness. She had plenty of fresh air at other times of the day, but she was never alone in it; the children were always with her.

She dressed herself quietly, but neatly and deftly, as she always did, and then, summoning Kate, the nursemaid, to sit in the nursery while she was out, she ran downstairs with the letter in her hand, and let herself out into the street.

It was a lovely summer night; dark, for there was no moon. But the sky was cloudless, and the stars showed clear and countless against its deep blue. There were a few people strolling about; people who were respectable and decorous enough, and had simply escaped from their own closer quarters in the neighbourhood to breathe for a little while the purer air of a wider enclosure, and to enjoy the one short space

of time, in the twenty-four hours of a summer day, in which the streets of London have an atmosphere and a calm which are cool and refreshing to tired brains and limbs.

Richenda took no heed of any of these; she had no eyes for anything but the beauty of the night. The clear tranquillity of the night, and the hush of the air after the hot turmoil that had reigned all through the long day, were very grateful to her; both for their own sakes and because they brought back memories of summer evenings in her own home—evenings that were really only so short a time ago, though they seemed to Richenda to be divided from her by an immeasurable gulf.

Her thoughts had been so engrossed in the past and its associations, from the first moment when she ran down the steps of the house, that she had not heard the house door shut again very softly, a moment after she herself had latched it; neither had she distinguished, among the other scattered footsteps, the sound of a light tread that steadily followed her own at a short distance.

Amelia, the smart parlourmaid, had hated Richenda from the moment when she opened the door for her on the day she was first engaged by Mrs. Fitzgerald. It would be difficult to explain precisely all the reasons for this violent feeling. Of course, its main features were simple enough. The smart, half-educated, but shrewd servant had seen at a glance that Richenda did not belong to the same class as her own, and had seen, too, that in spite of her unassumingly quiet and plain dress, the class that she did belong to was a higher one.

It is quite easy to talk fluently of the breaking down of the barriers of class. It is quite easy to speak glibly of all that humanity has in common as a force powerful enough to bring about that breaking-down. But it will never actually become an accomplished fact. The prejudice in the mind of one set of people against another which has been born to different circumstances is ineradicable, and springs up again and again in spite of all that has been done, and is being done, to crush it. Perhaps, paradoxical as it sounds, it is even stronger for the much vaunted spread of education. At any rate, the fact remains that Amelia, who had been well and even excellently educated, was the more bitter against Richenda and the more jealous of her advantages, because of that fact, than

an ignorant girl would have been. She realised, as the latter never could, that, do what she might, she could never quite acquire Richenda's ways, manners, and habits of thought. And the personal dislike which burnt fiercely enough in her was fanned to flame by the loud consentient voices of the other servants, and by a hearty contempt for Richenda's "airs" as Amelia called them; meaning her privileges of having her meals in the nursery, and also her evident dislike for converse with the rest of the servants' hall.

The final point of Amelia's anger had been reached one evening when she herself, on trying to make out by an inquisitive conversation the details of Richenda's life, had been gently but firmly shown that neither her presence nor her questions were wanted in the nursery. She had withdrawn with an angry founce, and a muttered determination to make the "stuck-up minx" pay for her disdain. And since then her one endeavour had been to find out some defect or mistake in Richenda's conduct by which she might get her into trouble. Her lively imagination had at first decided that the letters Richenda wrote, of which she managed to keep account, must be to a "young man," or several young men. Finding out with much disgust that they were to her brothers, and that that fact alone accounted for their number, she next decided that because Richenda almost always asked leave to post them herself she probably used the pillar-post as a place of assignation with some one.

To night being the second consecutive night on which Richenda had gone to the post, Amelia's excitement could scarcely contain itself, and she looked upon Mrs. Fitzgerald's absence as specially arranged by Fate for allowing her personally to investigate Richenda's doings. So she had watched her out, and only waited for her to get a short start before she stealthily, with a letter of her own in her hand by way of excuse, followed her along the street.

The nearest pillar-box was some little way distant from number twelve. To reach it it was necessary to go all down Bryanson Street and to cross a thoroughfare, to reach the corner of a square garden, where it stood, more or less in the shadow of a large tree in the garden.

Amelia had reached the end of the street. She did not intend to cross the thoroughfare, but simply to stay where she was in the convenient shadow of a portico, to watch Richenda while she crossed and posted her

letter. Thence, if nothing at all happened at the pillar, she could come out and follow Richenda home again. So she stood in the shadow and waited. Meanwhile the unconscious Richenda took her way across the thoroughfare rather slowly. She was enjoying the cool air so much that she had no wish to cut the short time she had in it yet shorter.

Just as she began to cross, the figure of a man in evening dress, with a cigarette in his mouth, came sauntering along by the railings that bounded the square garden.

Fergus Kennaway had been dining with some relations in a house on the other side of that square. The relations had dined at seven, and Kennaway had, to use his own expression, been so "deadly bored" during and after that meal, that his feelings had constrained him to take his leave of the house and its inmates at a quarter-past nine.

He was strolling now towards a cab-stand, trying meanwhile to make up his mind how to spend the rest of the evening that remained before a supper engagement he had at half-past eleven. His eyes had been idly scanning for some moments the girlish figure that was approaching the pillar-box from the other side of the way. But when Richenda came into the full light of the lamp at the corner of the pavement surrounding the garden, Kennaway flung away his cigarette with a sudden inarticulate expression of surprise.

"Great Scott!" he said to himself the next moment, "here's something amusing at any rate! I call that a Providence, now, I do indeed."

He quickened his pace and reached his side of the pillar just as Richenda reached hers. Amelia had emerged from the portico shadow, and stood watchful, intent, and alert, on the opposite side of the way. Richenda posted her letter without looking up, the pillar was between her and Kennaway, and she merely saw that some one else was waiting to post a letter, and hurried her own movements.

"Aha, my haughty lady! Luck's on my side at last! Now I've met you without those worrying brats perhaps you'll have a word to spare for me."

At the first tone of his voice Richenda started violently. She turned upon him a face crimson with annoyance.

"Indeed I have not, and never shall have," she said. And then she turned abruptly to cross the road again.

But Fergus Kennaway was not going to lose his opportunity so easily. Two or

three quick steps enabled him to catch her up, and staring coolly into her face he said :

"There's no such hurry ! You don't go in until you've shown yourself a little more sociable, and smoothed that haughty frown of yours."

With her lips set till they were almost white, and her whole face very pale, Richenda walked on without a word.

"Have some pity on a fellow, now," began Fergus Kennaway with a change of manner.

They had crossed the road now, and had reached the Bryanston Street pavement. Amelia, with her eyes sparkling, her face aflame with excitement, had slipped back into the shadow of her portico.

"A poor fellow who is just breaking his heart," he continued, "because you're such an icicle !"

Every muscle in Richenda's face was rigid ; she was walking as fast as her feet would carry her. She looked from side to side for some one to appeal to ; but at the moment it chanced no one was visible save two or three stray young men of much the same calibre as Fergus Kennaway himself. The faster she walked the more easily he quickened his stride. Neither of them was aware of Amelia's soft footsteps coming stealthily behind within earshot.

"Look here, now," he continued, "be reasonable ! What will you take for a kiss ? Would a dozen pair of gloves suit your ladyship, or is there anything else you fancy ? I don't care what it is ! Say what you like—a diamond brooch, if you like—and you shall have it if you'll give me one kiss !"

"Mr. Kennaway !" The words seemed to come from between Richenda's closed lips. "How can you, how dare you insult me so ? You forget yourself entirely ! If you do not go away this instant it will be necessary for me to speak to Mrs. Fitzgerald. I have already thought of asking her protection against your insolence."

"Asking her protection indeed !" sneered Fergus Kennaway. "You are riding the high horse, my pretty maiden ! But you'll have to come down. What I want I'll have, and if you won't give it when I ask for it I'll take it, that's all !"

He slipped his arm round Richenda's waist as he spoke ; Richenda looked wildly round. She was close to the door of number twelve now, but not a soul was in sight save one young man coming saunteringly in the opposite direction. Richenda tore herself away with a little scream. Fergus Kennaway caught her again.

"I will have it !" he said.

He was just drawing her struggling figure closer when the sauntering steps of the young man coming changed into a quick run, and Fergus Kennaway felt a firm hand on his collar.

"Get out of this, you cur !" hissed a voice in his ear.

It was Sir Roderick Graeme.

There was a moment's paralysed silence as the two men and the girl saw each other's faces. Then Richenda's quick breath changed into low, choking sobs. She turned and flew up the two steps. Immediately afterwards the door was opened and she disappeared into the house.

CHAPTER X.

"My dear Brian, if you won't stand still, I can't possibly dress you !"

"He's a dreadful naughty boy, and I'm good, aren't I, nursey darling ?"

The words were uttered simultaneously. Richenda was in the nursery getting the children ready for their afternoon walk. Veronica and Dolly, quite dressed, were sitting like models of propriety on two little chairs, while Brian fidgeted incessantly under Richenda's efforts to arrange the collar of his clean sailor suit.

Richenda was feeling very shaken and miserable to day, as her pale face and somewhat sunken eyes amply testified. Her nerves in the first place had been thoroughly upset by the encounter of the night before. In the second, the quality that was strongest of all, perhaps, in Richenda, her self-respect, had received a terrible wound. It was inexpressibly bitter to her to realise that she had been quite unable to defend herself from Fergus Kennaway's insolent advances. And last of all, a feeling which she did not quite understand, or try to understand, was the sorest point of all. It hurt her more than all to think that it was Sir Roderick Graeme who had seen her thus humiliated. She could not bear to think what he must think of her after having found her in such a position. That it was by no means her fault, and that this must have been evident to him, did not comfort Richenda at all. He had seen her, he had found her under circumstances that stung every fibre of womanliness in her into throbbing revolt. And it was worse suffering to her to know this than the circumstances themselves had been.

She had cried long and bitterly in the comparative shelter of her own soft white pillows the night before ; cried until uneasy movements from Veronica's crib made her choke back her sobs, and try instead to

collect her thoughts and resolve what was best to do. She had spent the rest of her wakeful night in trying to make up her mind as to whether she would leave her situation and say nothing, or whether she should appeal to Mrs. Fitzgerald for her help and protection. She had come to no decision, though, when she rose, and no further light had dawned on the question all through the hours of the long hot morning; hours during which even the chatter of the children, falling on her tumultuous resentment, perplexity, and anxiety, had seemed almost more than she could endure. She was conscious now of a slight touch of irritation in the tone in which she had spoken to Brian, and she was steadying her voice to respond to Veronica when the nursery door opened and Amelia inserted her face into the aperture.

"Mrs. Fitzgerald wants to see you in her boudoir at once," she said curtly.

"Wants to see me?" said Richenda in answer, looking up from Brian's suit with some surprise. "Does she know I'm just going out with the children, I wonder? What had I better do, now? I suppose she only wants me for a minute, though. Amelia"—Richenda spoke as she always did, very gently and courteously, to the girl—"would you please mind asking her if Kate shall start with the children, then? They're just ready to go."

Without deigning any answer, Amelia flounced away from the door, to flounce back again breathless in a moment or two.

"Mrs. Fitzgerald says you're to send the children out with Kate. You're to go this minute," was her triumphantly spoken message.

Richenda released Brian with increased surprise. Mrs. Fitzgerald greatly disliked sending the children out under the nursemaid's care as a rule. However, there was no time for her to delay or argue, she must certainly obey, so she summoned the nursemaid, and among a chorus of "Come quick back, nurse, dear, we don't want to go without you—we like it best with you!" she left the nursery.

Outside, on the first landing, much to her surprise, she found Amelia still lingering. If Richenda had been at all suspicious by nature she would have seen in the girl's air and face a longing to be questioned and an overwhelming sense of triumph. But Richenda, in her innocence, never dreamed of connecting Amelia with her summons, much less of asking her any questions. Richenda went rather slowly down the long

narrow staircases, her head ached so, and she felt so tremulous still that it was impossible for her to do anything quickly. She was wondering, too, vaguely and confusedly, whether, the opportunity being thus made for her as it were, it did not come as an indirect answer to her perplexed self-questionings as to whether she should or should not tell Mrs. Fitzgerald her distress, and whether she should accept it as such. She reached the boudoir door, and receiving a sharply spoken permission, entered. Mrs. Fitzgerald was seated by the shaded window in a chair facing the door.

"Amelia said you wished to speak to me?" Richenda said simply. She lifted, as she spoke, her eyes to Mrs. Fitzgerald's face, and then for the first time an entirely new thought flashed across her mind. She felt sick and cold all at once, and she held to the handle of the door for support. She knew that what Mrs. Fitzgerald had to say concerned the scene of the evening before.

Mrs. Fitzgerald's face was dark with passion. It was often angry, but it had never, since Richenda's knowledge of it, looked as it now looked.

"Wished to speak to you!" she said, in a voice that was choked with fury. "Naturally I wish to speak to you! I wish for some explanation of the disgraceful scene that took place last night. I engaged you on the understanding that you were a girl of decent bringing up—and——"

She was interrupted. Richenda's voice was so far away and so set that she herself scarcely knew it for her own, and she stood rigidly upright.

"Stop!" she said. "I will not hear a word against my bringing up. You will have the goodness to make your accusation definite. Whatever it may be, I ask to hear it."

Mrs. Fitzgerald stared through the dimness of the shaded room at Richenda. Something in the girl's ringing, steady tones had thrown a cold dash of water on the flames of her anger. It changed to a smothered sullenness as she went on.

"I've heard all about your behaviour last night. I know every detail of it—every detail of the disgraceful way in which you had arranged to meet Mr. Kennaway at the post, and the absolutely shameless encouragement you gave him as you walked back. My informant saw it all! She even saw his arm round your waist. Now what have you to say?"

"Simply that I think you have made a mistake. It is Mr. Fergus Kennaway whom you ought to interview and not me. Your

informant could have told you that if he or she had the faintest regard for truth."

Richenda had taken her hand from the door handle and now stood absolutely upright, with both hands clasped and hanging down in front of her, and her face set in every line and nearly as white as her white dress. There was something curiously convincing about that rigid little white figure, and the steady utterance that came from it. For a moment as she looked at it Mrs. Fitzgerald's convictions were a little shaken, though her anger was not altered.

"My informant was reliable," she said. "And, besides," she added, her voice becoming the more tremulous with passion as she felt her ground less certain, "I know for myself that this is not the first time such a thing has happened. Last night's occurrence was only the latest of a series of meetings between you and Mr. Fergus Kennaway. He has constantly met you when you have been out with the children."

"To my indescribable annoyance," put in Richenda.

"These meetings," went on Mrs. Fitzgerald, taking not the slightest notice of the interruption, "can only have been arranged by yourself. Mr. Kennaway is not the sort of man to pursue without encouragement a young woman in your position in life. And that encouragement he has of course received!"

"Encouragement!" Over Richenda's pale face came a sudden flush, and her great shining eyes flashed. "Mrs. Fitzgerald, I have listened to what you have to say. Will you let me now tell you my story?"

Mr. Fergus Kennaway occasioned me annoyance on the very first day I entered your house. He has pursued me constantly since then. I have done all I possibly could to show him my feelings. I have given him every discouragement that a girl can give to a man for whom she feels nothing but contempt. My meeting with him last night was purely accidental, and he used the opportunity to put a crowning insult to all his other insults. When you sent for me, I was making up my mind to tell you this, and to ask your assistance and your protection against him for the future."

As she spoke, the flush on Richenda's cheeks had deepened until it became a crimson glow. Her eyes were still more brilliant now with anger, and her hands were clasping and unclasping in excited agitation.

Mrs. Fitzgerald laughed scornfully.

"I don't think you need either assistance or protection," she said. "If you think you do, you have certainly looked for them in the wrong quarter! I cannot assist or protect girls who can do neither for themselves! And I will not keep in my service a young woman who is so incapable of managing her own affairs—to say the very least of it—for I still believe, and shall believe, that the whole entanglement is your own work."

"You do not believe my word, then?"

Richenda's voice was steady no longer; it was trembling almost uncontrollably with anger that would not be repressed.

"You will leave my service this day month!" was all the answer she received. "You may go!"

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